Programs pay tribute to 9/11 victims in words, music

BY STEVE DANIEL

The Old Dominion University community paid fitting – and moving – tributes Sept. 11 to those who lost their lives in the terrorist attacks a year ago.

Hundreds of faculty, staff and students gathered in front of Webb Center at 8:30 a.m. for a program of remarks, music, prayer and silence.

David B. Palmer, an assistant chief with the the city of Norfolk Department of Fire-Rescue and a recent graduate of Old Dominion's master's of public administration program, gave the introductory remarks.

In addition to honoring all of those who came to the aid of the 9/11 victims, Palmer announced, "I want to assure all those gathered here today that your emergency responders are better prepared and more ready now than we were one year ago in the event a disaster of any kind strikes us.

"This is due in great measure to the cooperation and very hard work of our people in each fire-rescue station and police precinct, 911 center, hospital, clinic and pharmacy, emergency operations center and military base, to name just a few."

Palmer's father, Allan V. Palmer, taught in Old Dominion's business school in the 1960s and served as chair of the M.B.A. program in the latter part of the decade.

The program also included remarks by Thomas Lankford, a junior occupational and technical studies major from Chesapeake, who volunteered his time to help with clean-up efforts at the Pentagon.

Speaking at the morning program, President Roseann Runte said, "May we each use this lesson in the brevity of life to accomplish good and kind deeds each day, and may our memory of this assault on our democratic republic strengthen our resolve to ensure that those freedoms for which America stands live on in our hearts, govern our deeds and light the future of our children with hope."

The Diehn Fine and Performing Arts Center atrium was the site for a program of music and poetry the evening of Sept. 11, sponsored by the music and English departments.

Old Dominion's Symphony Orchestra, Women's Chorale, Men's Chorale, Concert Choir and Wind Ensemble performed. Among the selections was music professor Adolphus Hailstork's piece, "As Falling Leaves," which he wrote in response to the events of last Sept. 11.

Three members of the English department – Luisa Igloria, Sheri Reynolds and Tim Seibles – along with President Runte read poems they wrote in response to the attacks.

PHOTO BY CHUCK THOMAS

Hundreds of members of the campus community gathered on Kaufman Mall Sept. 11 to observe the anniversary of the terrorist attacks. Second-year physical therapy students Sharon Sampson, Laurie Etherington and Kim Feiring hold tight to the flag as they listen to the national anthem.

September

By Roseann Runte

Like unforgotten words flowing from a pen,
Like withering leaves adrift from an
autumnal vine,
Suspended from the skies,
People fall from a fiery inferno,
Locked in death's embrace.

Silent screams punctuate the page
We turn, and cannot turn away
For they are our family
For they are us.

Riveted by replay,
Images coalesce
Seared in black and white and blood.
Slowly, irrevocably,
Horror acquires a name.

George who kissed his wife
and Peter who forgot.
Mary who could have stayed home
But didn't.
Petra who was
Trampled in the stairs
And Nadya who saved another.

You are our brothers, our sisters
Our kith and kin, our heroes, our victims
Your sighs of hope or despair
Whisper still in the night air
As dusk daily anoints
The earth with ashen tone.

Like a thousand notes falling pell mell
From a golden-bowled sax,
Like the thundering stillness
Of a photo of Niagara Falls,
Your cries linger long into the season.
And, with each rain
The earth is sown once again with salt.

Like the sharps and flats
Of an unscored symphony,
Like the reverberation of a tear
Hitting the Times Square pavement,
Liberty, mourns, swathed in a mantle of
sadness.
Baton in immobile arm upstretched
She wrenches from the skies a hymn.

For those who live and cannot forget,
For Amy whose husband kissed her,
And May whose husband did not.
For the children of the valiant,
For the friends of the fearful,
For each of us.

That we may translate
Anger into gestures of peace
And violence into songs of love.
That pain may become beauty,
While from the scarred memory of our people
There may blossom new courage
To live, to let our hearts beat as one,
And, yes, above all, to remember.

PHOTO BY DANNY HOLCOMB

Bagpiper Terrence W. Bobka, director of music, Royal Canadian Legion of Virginia, marches away at the end of the 9/11 morning program playing "Amazing Grace." Pictured in the background with President Runte is David B. Palmer (M.P.A. '01), an assistant fire chief for the city of Norfolk who spoke at the ceremony.

Silberman's short play on 9/11 debuts in NYC

In the wake of Sept. 11, 2001, writers, musicians, artists of all mediums, even people who have never considered themselves creative, struggled to find an outlet for the feelings evoked by that day that changed this nation. Brian Silberman was not one of them.

An assistant professor of English, a successful playwright and former resident of Manhattan, one would think Silberman would be quick to write about the day. He wasn't.

In fact, even when approached by a New York director friend, Erica Gould, to participate in a performing arts festival commemorating the date, Silberman didn't know if he had a 9/11 piece in him. But he decided to try. And once he finally found his topic, an hour later the piece was done.

On Sept. 10, 2002, the fruits of his effort, a short play called "Throw," took shape on stage at Manhattan's Town Hall as part of the "Brave New World" festival, which featured works by writers such as Christopher Durang, John Guare and Beth Henley, over the course of three days. Oscar, Emmy and Tony Award-winning actors were attached to the pieces – people like Susan Sarandon, Tim Robbins, Holly Hunter, Sarah Jessica Parker. In fact Parker's husband, Matthew Broderick, starred in Silberman's piece alongside Trudie Styler (the wife of rock legend Sting) and Billy Crudup.

SILBERMAN

The piece tells the story of a father who, after the towers fell, walked from downtown to his home in New Jersey. He tells his family of the broken glass flying through the air and the debris everywhere. The images stick with the 8-year-old son, who then becomes obsessed with throwing anything he can, any time he can. Silberman equates throwing with expressing the child's fear of loss.

Currently there are no plans to produce the work locally, but the event organizers are considering publishing the pieces, Silberman said.

– Elizabeth V. Harders